

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An exposure apparatus having an illuminating optics unit for irradiating a reticle, on which a predetermined pattern has been formed, with exposing light emitted

5 from an exposing light source, a reticle stage on which the reticle is placed, a projection optics unit for projecting the predetermined pattern of the reticle onto a substrate, and a substrate stage on which the substrate is placed, said apparatus comprising:

10 at least one chamber for internally accommodating the illuminating optics unit, the reticle stage, the projection optics unit and the substrate stage;

first pressure control means for making pressure inside the chamber higher than pressure outside the

15 chamber; and

first correction means for correcting optical characteristics of the projection optics unit in accordance with a value of pressure inside the chamber.

20 2. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the reticle is irradiated with exposing light, which has been emitted by the exposing light source, via the illuminating optics unit, the predetermined pattern that has been formed on the reticle is projected onto the substrate via the projection optics unit to expose the

substrate to the pattern, and the exposing light has an optical path the entirety of which is sealed within at least one chamber, said apparatus further comprising:

second pressure control means for making pressure
5 inside this chamber higher than pressure outside this
chamber; and

second correction means for correcting optical
characteristics of the projection optics unit in
accordance with a value of pressure inside this chamber.

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3. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the
interior of said chamber is filled with inert gas.

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4. The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the
inert gas is nitrogen gas or helium gas or a mixed gas
of nitrogen gas and helium gas.

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5. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein control
is performed in such a manner that pressure inside said
chamber is made higher, by a fixed amount, than pressure
outside the chamber

6. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein pressure
inside said chamber is constant.

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7. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a first pressure sensor for sensing the value of pressure inside said chamber and a second pressure sensor for sensing value of pressure outside said
5 chamber.

8. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said first correction means estimates amount of change in optical characteristics of said projection optics unit
10 based upon index of refraction, which varies in accordance with the value of pressure inside said chamber, and corrects the optical characteristics of said projection optics unit based upon the estimated amount of change in optical characteristics of said
15 projection optics unit.

9. The apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a substrate load-lock chamber in the vicinity of said substrate stage and a reticle load-lock chamber
20 in the vicinity of said reticle stage.

10. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said illuminating optics unit, said reticle stage, said projection optics unit and said substrate stage are
25 accommodated in respective ones of separate chambers.

11. The apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said illuminating optics unit, said reticle stage, said projection optics unit and said substrate stage are
5 accommodated in at least two separate chambers.

12. A method of manufacturing a semiconductor device, comprising the steps of:

placing a group of manufacturing equipment for
10 various processes, inclusive of the exposure apparatus having an illuminating optics unit for irradiating a reticle, on which a predetermined pattern has been formed, with exposing light emitted from an exposing light source, a reticle stage on which the reticle is
15 placed, a projection optics unit for projecting the predetermined pattern of the reticle onto a substrate, and a substrate stage on which the substrate is placed, said apparatus comprising:

at least one chamber for internally accommodating
20 the illuminating optics unit, the reticle stage, the projection optics unit and the substrate stage;

first pressure control means for making pressure inside the chamber higher than pressure outside the chamber; and

25 first correction means for correcting optical

characteristics of the projection optics unit in
accordance with a value of pressure inside the chamber,
in a plant for manufacturing semiconductor devices; and
manufacturing a semiconductor device by a plurality
5 of processes using this group of manufacturing
equipment.

13. The method according to claim 12, further
comprising:

10 interconnecting the manufacturing equipment by a
local-area network; and
communicating, by data communication, information
relating to at least one piece of manufacturing
equipment in said group thereof between the local-area
15 network and an external network outside said plant.

14. The method according to claim 13, wherein
maintenance information for said manufacturing equipment
is obtained by accessing, by data communication via the
20 external network, a database provided by a vendor of
said manufacturing equipment or by a user, or production
management is performed by data communication with a
plant other than said first-mentioned plant via the
external network.

15. A plant for manufacturing a semiconductor device, comprising:

a group of manufacturing equipment for various processes, inclusive of the exposure apparatus having an

5 illuminating optics unit for irradiating a reticle, on which a predetermined pattern has been formed, with exposing light emitted from an exposing light source, a reticle stage on which the reticle is placed, a projection optics unit for projecting the predetermined 10 pattern of the reticle onto a substrate, and a substrate stage on which the substrate is placed, said apparatus comprising:

at least one chamber for internally accommodating the illuminating optics unit, the reticle stage, the

15 projection optics unit and the substrate stage;

first pressure control means for making pressure inside the chamber higher than pressure outside the chamber; and

first correction means for correcting optical 20 characteristics of the projection optics unit in accordance with a value of pressure inside the chamber;

a local-area network for interconnecting the group of manufacturing equipment; and

a gateway for making it possible to access, from 25 said local-area network, an external network outside the

plant;

whereby information relating to at least one of the pieces of manufacturing equipment can be communicated by data communication.